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Jean Guiart, 1925–2019

Jean Guiart was a singular figure within Pacific anthropology. Remarkable for his energetic data collection methods and for decades of prodigious publication, he was also notorious for his fierce criticism of the work of many of his fellow scholars, sometimes shading into caustic comment about their character and politics. One of his last, self-published books, *Précis de la méthode en anthropologie sociale*, for example, complained of the ignorance and mediocrity that he presumed to characterise post-war French anthropology. The title of another, *Bêtisier Océanien: Ce qu'il faut savoir de l'Océanie et dictionnaire des erreurs accumulées* ('Oceanic Bloopers', 2013), or that of a three volume set of his reminiscences, *Ça plait ou ça ne plait pas*, perhaps gives some idea of the critical project to which he dedicated his final years. Alongside Zola-esque accusation, however, Guiart left behind remarkable compendia of ethnographic data that he collected throughout New Caledonia and Vanuatu. He also mentored and published various island scholars and authors.

Born 1925 into a cosmopolitan, Protestant family in Lyon, Guiart passed away 4 August 2019 at his home in Puna'auia, near Pape'ete, Tahiti. He descended from a long and privileged line of doctors. Anglophone and Germanophone, Guiart played a minor role in wartime resistance efforts. Influenced by his mother, he began graduate work as a seminarian but soon moved into ethnology. He enrolled at École Pratique des Hautes Études and École des Langues Orientales Vivantes, where he took courses from missionary scholar Maurice Leenhardt, who he had previously met at a youth church camp. After the war, France established l'Institut Français d'Océanie (IFO) with Leenhardt as its director, and Leenhardt in 1947 appointed Guiart, who was working with the Musée de l'Homme, as head of the Institute's Laboratory of Ethnology based in New Caledonia. From here, Guiart accepted a position back with l'École Pratique des Hautes Études at the Sorbonne in 1968, then, in 1973, as professor of ethnology at Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle and Director of the Musée de l'Homme's Ethnology Laboratory, before finally retiring in 1991 to Nouméa and then Tahiti.

Guiart, during his first decade as a young scholar in Nouméa, developed useful connections with colonial authorities, with other academics and with island elites including New Caledonian Protestant pastors and church leaders. He advised on efforts to restructure New Caledonia's colonial administration, including extending citizenship and suffrage to indigenous inhabitants. In the New Hebrides, French Resident Commissioner Pierre Anthonioz, a Guiart patron, invited him to investigate village disputes on Malakula in 1950–1951; Tanna's John Frum Movement in 1951–1952; and economic possibilities of coffee plantations in highlands Espiritu Santo in 1954. Patrick O'Reilly, in *Hébridais* (1957: 88), his 'bio-bibliographique' directory, lauded Guiart's applied anthropological work in the archipelago: Guiart 'oriented his research in such a manner not to focus on pure theory but so that it could help the job of administration, providing this with precise facts about local affairs and about indigenous needs, a better understanding of their interests and mentality. He succeeded perfectly' [our translation].

It is difficult to choose, among Guiart's many publications, which most to celebrate. Annotated bibliographies available on his website (jeanguart.org) list more than 43 books (many of these, since 1997, published by Le Rocher à la Voile—a press that Guiart established and named after a rock formation at the west end of Ansa Vata beach in Nouméa), and more than 150 articles and shorter publications. In a radio interview, Guiart defined the ethnographer's job as to observe and listen with respect. He favoured data collection over theoretical argument, claiming to be one of the few post-war

	
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1 French anthropologists who identified neither with structuralism nor Marxism, even if he appreciated
2 their methodological uses. Guiart's 1956 account of the John Frum Movement, *Un siècle et demi de*
3 *contacts culturels à Tanna, Nouvelles Hébrides*, is notable insofar as it illustrates Guiart's applied con-
4 cerns with history and social change and his vigorous data collection methods. Guiart, like Ian Hogbin
5 and other post-war ethnographers, moved beyond earlier models of functionalist order and stability to
6 address social transformation and the Pacific War's impact on island societies. Although Guiart used
7 the term sparingly, mostly in the Preface, this monograph (which Guiart submitted for his ethnology
8 diplôme) was the first in a series of classic 'cargo cult' ethnographies published between 1956 and
9 1964, followed by Margaret Mead on Paliau, Peter Worsley's cargo cult overview, Kenelm Burridge
10 on Mambu, Robert Maher's Purari New Men and Peter Lawrence on the Yali Movement.

11 The book included, as an appendix, the first of several *Inventaires Sociologiques* that collated social data
12 that Guiart doggedly recorded in rapid regional surveys. His Tanna inventory covered hundreds of locations
13 across the island, with their associated kava and dancing grounds. For each, he reported population numbers,
14 exchange connections with neighbouring places, names of men with claims to one of the two types of chiefly
15 titles along with associated other rights, and names of other men who managed cultigen and animal fertility
16 and natural forces by means of the island's power stones, with much attendant, footnoted detail. Michael
17 Allen, who in 1958 chased Guiart around Emau Island where he was collecting another sociological inven-
18 tory, reported that Guiart advised him that 'one or two days was the maximum time that one could expect
19 a small Melanesian village to put up with the presence of a foreign anthropologist', and that quick marches
20 from village to village across an island kept the anthropologist healthy. Guiart compiled additional inven-
21 tories of New Caledonian and Loyalty Island chiefly systems that he published in *La chefferie en Mélanésie du*
22 *sud* (1963), which earned his *thèse de doctorat*. In 1963 and 1965, working with medical explorer Carleton
23 Gajdusek and others, he inventoried similar data on Tongariki in Vanuatu's Shepherd Islands. Although
24 these inventories today are much contested, they offer rich archives of community and cultural detail.

25 Guiart pursued interests in material culture while at the Musée de l'Homme and also in Nouméa
26 where he collected New Caledonian myths and legends and published reviews of island masks and
27 other indigenous art. Back at Musée de l'Homme, he enlarged the museum's collections and contin-
28 ued to publish analyses and catalogues of Pacific material culture, including *The Arts of the South*
29 *Pacific* (1963) among many others. He sharply criticised moving much of the museum's collection to
30 Musée de Quai Branly when this opened in 2006. Guiart arranged a headstone to mark the Southwest
31 Bay, Malakula grave of Bernard Deacon, and he worked with Pacific archaeologists, notably José
32 Garanger who drew on oral histories that Guiart had collected to locate and excavate the spectacular
33 grave site of seventeenth century stranger chief Roi Mata and his court on Eretoka Island. The island
34 and surrounding areas are today a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

35 Guiart joins Roi Mata in the grave as a complicated Pacific ancestor about whom much has been,
36 and will be, said. His wife, Joséphine Pawé Wahnyamala, of Lifou Island origin, predeceased him in
37 2012. He is survived by two sons Armand and René.

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